

Springfield, PA— Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) today delivered remarks at the Arc of Delaware County's (DELARC) 2007 Legislative Breakfast at the Springfield Country Club. Hosted by DELARC's Governmental Affairs Committee, the annual breakfast provides a forum for the organization to provide information and updates regarding the issues facing both children and adults with developmental disabilities. — Congressman Sestak discussed his support for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) legislation and his disappointment that the House failed to override the President's veto of this legislation which would have provided greater assistance to families of children with developmental disabilities. "Many families of children with disabilities are middle class and do not have access to insurance available to low income families," Congressman Sestak said. "At the same time, they cannot afford to pay for private health insurance. The potential is there for these children to fall through the cracks and be denied access to programs and treatments that can improve their quality of life."

Joe spoke of two of his priorities in supporting the intellectually and developmentally disabled: First, to expand community-based support for individuals with disabilities. Second, to help enforce the rights of the disabled. Within these two areas are a number of initiatives being pursued at the federal level.

Among these initiatives is the Developmental Disabilities Assistance Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) which focuses on the estimated 4.5 million children and adults in the United States who have developmental disabilities. Its purpose is to assure that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families participate in the design of and have access to needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote independence, productivity, and self-determination in the lives of these individuals, and create opportunities for them to participate fully in community life through programs authorized under the Act.

The Congressman also discussed the vital need to provide support and assistance to professionals who serve as personal care assistants, home care aides, and staff in community residential facilities who assist people with disabilities with medication, preparing and eating meals, dressing, mobility, and handling daily affairs. Congressman Sestak is a co-sponsor of the Direct Support Professionals Fairness and Security Act of 2007 (H.R. 1279). This bipartisan legislation would aid professionals working in the disabilities community. The bill would give states the ability to use federal funds to increase the wages for direct support professionals who provide supports to individuals of all ages with disabilities under the Medicaid program.

"Men and women who work in the Direct Support industry receive wages ranging from \$7.50 to \$8.23 per hour for work that is physically and emotionally demanding," Congressman Sestak said. "Too often they leave the profession to work in the fast food or retail industries where they can receive higher pay and better benefits in a less challenging environment. As a result, there is great turnover of workers in the Direct Support industry, making it much more difficult for people with disabilities to obtain adequate assistance, leaving their health—and sometimes their lives—in jeopardy."

Another issue that directly impacts the lives of children with disabilities is the federal No Child

Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002, which is currently up for reauthorization. One percent of children in each school district—those with the most severe developmental disabilities—take alternate assessments and examinations in measuring their progress. Recent actions by the Department of Education permit another one percent of those who are considered developmentally disabled to take alternative assessments. As a member of the House Education and Labor Committee and the Sub-Committee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, Congressman Sestak has been a leading advocate for the educational advancement of children with disabilities.

“I want to ensure that allowing additional children with developmental disabilities to take an alternate assessment does not negatively impact students with disabilities,” Congressman Sestak said. “It is imperative that the goals of NCLB does not permit those who are to be in the 1% and 2% group to slip through the cracks in their education. I am working on an amendment in the NCLB reauthorization to require state permission under federal guidelines to place students in the two percent category, and mandated that a study be conducted to determine the best assessments to serve students with disabilities. This is important for ensuring that these children will receive the full benefit of educational opportunity.”

In fighting to protect the rights of the disabled, the Congressman talked about his co-sponsorship of the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act (H.R. 493) that would prohibit employers, employment agencies, and labor organizations from requesting or requiring genetic testing of individuals or family members. It would also prohibit employers from using genetic information to make hiring or promotion decisions or to determine an individual's eligibility for training programs; it would prohibit insurers from requesting or requiring genetic testing of individuals or families; and it would prohibit insurers from using genetic information to determine eligibility or establish premiums.

“Too many disabled Americans suffer from discrimination in the workplace and by insurance companies,” Congressman Sestak said. “This legislation would make it illegal for employers to use genetic information to make decisions regarding hiring and promotions, and for insurers to use this information to deny coverage or set higher premiums. It would also give men and women the comfort of knowing that they can undergo genetic testing that would help them to proactively address their managed care without fear that this information could be used against them in the work place.”

Finally, Congressman Sestak emphasized his support for initiatives that would provide greater housing opportunities for people with disabilities. He voted in favor of the Section 8 Voucher Reform Act of 2007 (SEVRA). This act makes a number of enhancements to the Section 8 voucher, project-based, and public housing programs. SEVRA expands rental assistance opportunities, improves program efficiencies, and encourages family self-sufficiency.

SEVRA reforms the formula used to allocate Section 8 voucher funds to housing agencies to increase the number of families receiving vouchers by eliminating inefficiencies that have resulted in \$1.4 billion in unused funds and by incentives for agencies to use funds to assist more families. The number of housing vouchers issued has declined by 150,000 since 2004. In addition to reversing that number, SEVRA also authorizes 20,000 incremental vouchers in each

of the next five years, for a total of 100,000 new vouchers and permits. The bill includes new provisions to permit housing agencies to let families use housing vouchers as a down-payment on a first-time home purchase, and to use vouchers for purchase of a manufactured home on leased land.

"The reason this is important is that SEVRA will directly benefit people with disabilities who are having difficulty securing adequate housing," Congressman Sestak said. "I believe it is vital that we do all we can to make sure housing agencies have the resources to do assist the disabled to find safe and affordable housing. This measure will simplify that process and make it more accessible to a greater number of people. In addition, Section 811 housing, which is focused specifically upon those who are disabled, will have a minimum increase of four thousand units."

Founded in 1951 and incorporated in 1956, DELARC is a non-profit organization that serves as an advocate for civil rights, social inclusion and self-determination for persons with developmental disabilities and their families. DELARC offers myriad services to their members, including training, employment, education and recreational opportunities.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.